

Book Review: Reflection to Transformation: A Self-help Book for Teachers

Pill, Amanda

Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Pill, A. (2005). Book Review: Reflection to Transformation: A Self-help Book for Teachers. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 6(2), 173-174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146978740500600209>

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Overall this book is an excellent example of scholarship and professional experience in the areas of non-traditional students, access and widening participation and skills in higher education. The book can be read and enjoyed as an academic text and pored over as a source of excellent practical advice.

ANDREW MATHIESON

University of the West of England, Bristol

Reflection to Transformation: A Self-help Book for Teachers edited by Nick Zepke, Dean Nugent and Linda Leach. New Zealand: Dunmore Press, 2003. ISBN 0-86469-435-0.

'If you help adults learn this book is for you.' A confident opening statement but a promise that is, I believe, fulfilled by this 'self-help' book.

This book was written for teachers in the early years of a career in teaching adults but it also presents an interesting opportunity for the experienced teacher to critically reflect upon personal assumptions about:

- being a reflective practitioner,
- working with learners,
- supporting learning and teaching, and
- contexts for teaching and learning.

The book opens with a very useful overview of reflection, including practical strategies for becoming, or encouraging others to become, a reflective practitioner, followed by ideas for encouraging reflective practice. This work is scholarly and clearly underpinned by a wealth of knowledge about the theories relating to reflection. In addition, the writer's practical experience of supporting learners as they begin to engage with reflective practice is evident. The ability to move from theory to some very practical ideas to try out in sessions is a feature of this book and one which will make it very popular with those trying to help learners develop reflective practice.

A major focus of this text is the consideration of ways of working with learners to bring about transformation in their learning. Themes include the importance of interaction in bringing about learning, whether or not this interaction takes place face-to-face or online, and the need for power-sharing. Consideration of inclusive teaching and the need to value diversity follows; again the theory is clearly illustrated by reference to the extensive practical experience of the chapter authors and guidance for those wishing to experiment with some of their ideas. The discussion about the limits of 'individualism' compared with 'interdependence' is particularly powerful and gave this seasoned practitioner food for thought. Moving on from the direct support of learning that takes place within sessions, the development of the learning environment is considered. The chapter by Robin Graham, 'Preparing for Teaching', is an aide memoire on all that needs to be done in preparation for

a course to begin. Clearly this covers a wide range of activity and it contains enough detail to enable a new teacher to at least know what questions to ask, but being presented in such a stark way with everything that you need to do to prepare for just one course is not for the faint hearted, or indeed the night before an opening session!

Contexts for learning, the final section of this book, focuses on the importance of acknowledging one's connectedness with the 'global village' by stepping back in order to reflect upon and understand the impact of contextual issues that may be economic, cultural, political, etc. on thinking and professional practice. If transformative learning is to take place, and a more holistic approach to teaching developed, these most ingrained assumptions have to be recognized and questioned.

This book does have something for everyone who helps adults learn. I will certainly recommend certain chapters to new teachers and others to experienced colleagues. I suspect this is a book that a teacher may return to more than once and each time, having read and reflected upon their reading, come to understand something differently.

AMANDA PILL
University of Gloucestershire